

# CMS Connection

February 2019

## Director's Monthly Message: Janel L. Forde



With my history of working in city and state operations, I have been asked in my first weeks what appeals to me most about public service. I have worked in both the private and public sectors, and what I love about government, is that we have the opportunity to do big things, to make a real impact on peoples' lives. By the same token, government is an always-on proposition, one in which Illinois residents count on us to be there. The last week of January was a perfect example.

When it's CMS that ensures that reliable heat and electricity is provided to warming shelters to protect citizens from dangerous winter conditions, we're expected to deliver. When it's CMS mechanics keeping the IDOT Minute Men's trucks patrolling our roads and highways, often rescuing stranded motorists from sub-zero temperatures, it's assumed that we will be there.

In government, we don't get "snow days." We deliver the services that other agencies count on, and that often go unnoticed; that is, until they're not there. For that, I want to personally thank you all again for your selfless service and dedication during the dreaded, "polar vortex" last month. We do big things, and more often than not, we do it with little fanfare, as you'll read an example of in this edition's [Unsung Hero](#) feature.

Illinois obviously has its share of financial challenges and problems to solve. But, make no mistake; our state is not broken, nor is CMS. Seventy other state agencies

depend on us, and we navigate statutory and regulatory hurdles to provide the services they depend on for their operations. Can we improve how we go about accomplishing our mission? Certainly.

We can always improve. I have my own ideas about the direction of CMS, but I also want to hear from you, I want to consider your ideas, too. With every fresh start – and that's what Governor Pritzker and Lt. Governor Stratton represent – it's an opportunity to look at our organization with fresh, unfiltered eyes. The greatest enemy to progress in how government operates, whether it's the City of Chicago or state and federal, is the phrase, "This is how we've always done it." My challenge to you is to erase that from our collective language.

February is Black History Month, and Illinois has much to reflect on and celebrate. Southern and Central Illinois communities and courageous citizens played a pivotal role in the success of the Underground Railroad. African American physician, Dr. Daniel Hale Williams performed the first successful open-heart surgery at Chicago's Provident Hospital in 1893. The Pullman Porters demonstrated the resolve of the American labor union movement. Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. moved into Lawndale to bring attention to the poor urban housing conditions, and eventually changed it for the better. The nation's first black president Barack Obama and first lady Michelle still call Kenwood home. Together, we have much to be proud of, and the story continues to be written.



February is also Heart Health Awareness Month, along with the Go Red for Women campaign, and I urge our men and women alike to take a moment to schedule a physical exam with your doctor. The state offers terrific health insurance benefits, and by not taking the preventive steps to ensure we're there for our loved ones, we're doing ourselves a real disservice. So, make a phone call and make an appointment for your check-up. It's that easy; no excuses.

# Administrative Hearings Improves Through Collaboration and New Tools

Imagine feeling clearly discriminated against in a real estate transaction due to your sexual orientation. Or, perhaps all signs point to you losing your job based on your age. You want to seek some measure of justice to protect your basic civil rights, but with modest or marginal resources, you can't afford the legal fees to go to court. To whom do you turn to have your complaint heard? The Illinois Department of Human Rights (DHR) and the Illinois Human Rights Commission (HRC) are there to help.

And, it's through the Illinois Human Rights Act (Act) that DHR investigates and HRC adjudicates complaints of discrimination in the areas of employment, real estate transactions, financial credit, public accommodations, and education. Through the Act's broad coverage, extending protection to additional categories not afforded under federal law, such as military status, sexual orientation, order of protection, and arrest status, Illinois provides an important forum for its residents to seek justice.

Litigating one's case at HRC doesn't require paying filing fees, unlike the court system. Yet despite the State's best efforts to combat discrimination through enforcement of the Act, HRC's case backlog has meant thousands of people waited years for resolution of their complaints. It was recognized that without action, the pending caseload at HRC could top 3,000 unresolved complaints by FY20.

Since its creation in 2016, the CMS Bureau of Administrative Hearings has worked across State agencies to share best practices in administrative proceedings, identify ongoing impediments to efficiency, and find creative solutions to eliminate the backlog and improve service to the public. Backlog at the HRC was a challenge ripe for inter-agency collaboration. An Executive Order issued this past summer created an opportunity for the Bureau to partner with HRC, DHR, CMS's Office of Rapid Results, and the Department of Innovation and Technology (DoIT) to brainstorm a plan that would not only eliminate the case backlog within 15 months, but also implement lasting changes to prevent it from recurring.

CMS' Office of Rapid Results conducted a special, targeted workshop, led by **John Webber**, training more than a dozen staff in continuous process improvement techniques. Using the tools they learned, the inter-agency team identified unnecessary bottlenecks, developed streamlined



*The Inter-Agency team develops process maps in a Rapid Results training session, with the guidance of John Webber (checked shirt)*

processes, and instituted more rigid timeframes for each step in the filing and review process.

By increasing staffing as needed, applying more efficient processes, leveraging technology platforms, and continuously monitoring, reporting, and adapting performance, in just six short months HRC decreased its overall backlog by 44 percent. More importantly, HRC has, in coordination with CMS' Bureau of Administrative Hearings, instituted comprehensive training programs for staff and Commissioners, created robust informational materials for litigants, and drafted more user-friendly rules governing its proceedings. Ultimately, it's made it easier for the public to interact with the State.

"What's most exciting about our collaboration is that we're continuing to reinvent the way in which our State provides services to citizens, regardless of their means," said CMS' Bureau of Administrative Hearings Deputy Director **Katy Straub**. "This effort was never about simply hearing cases quickly. Its focus is on delivering timely, just, high-quality decisions for the people of Illinois."

The team looks forward to working with Governor Pritzker's administration to continue to improve services offered, and to reach a zero-case backlog without sacrificing due process or the quality of the decisions issued.



## Unsung Hero: Ryan Armstrong, Road Warrior



*Ryan Armstrong stands next to one of 70 five-ton trucks he services.*

For most of us, when the temperature dives to bone-chilling Winter extremes, we'd prefer to stay warm and safe in our homes. For CMS Division of Vehicles' traveling mechanic, **Ryan Armstrong**, he'd probably tell you that sounds good to him, too. Instead, Ryan awoke in the pre-dawn hours of January 30th and 31st

to a minus-25 air temperature with a minus-38 wind chill to start his day.

Ryan is the sole traveling mechanic supporting the Illinois Department of Transportation's (IDOT) Knoxville, Morton and Wyoming truck yards outside of Peoria. In the month of January alone, he drove over 2,400 miles to aid stranded IDOT truck drivers in Knox, Tazewell, Stark and Woodruff counties in Central Illinois.

Armstrong is an ASE-certified mechanic for autos, diesel trucks, hybrid-electric engines and more. Prior to starting with the State and CMS in 2017, Ryan worked as a mechanic for car dealerships. "For me, the most rewarding

part of this work is knowing that the more IDOT orange trucks I can keep on our roads makes a real difference," said Ryan. He adds, "Keeping our highways safe to travel – salted and plowed in these extremes – it's paramount. We all have families and loved ones who may have to drive these roads." No doubt he'd also rather be at home with son Henry, six, and his four-year old girl, Molly.

"I knocked off at 7:00 pm the first night, only to be called back at 8:00 for a truck broken down outside of Kewanee," he explained. "Road salt is brutal on sensitive engine electronics and other mechanical systems. You can really only work for about 10 minutes at a time in those conditions, and winds were whipping like a knife across those tilled corn fields. On one job that night, I had to improvise and use a paper clip I found in the truck to get it going and have it limp back into the garage."

He finally got home about 3:00 am that morning, only to have to do it again in a matter of hours. He worked covering three IDOT truck yards, 70 heavy trucks and 20 light pick-ups. "I love the job, you feel like you're making a difference. And it really is a team effort. We all count on each other, and I'm grateful to work with some wonderful people. Winter will come and go; you just have to do what you gotta do when people are counting on you."

**Ryan Armstrong: Another CMS Unsung Hero.**



*Ryan, with some of the IDOT road crew members he supports*



State of Illinois  
Central Management Services

# CMS

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